

would be acting more naturally, and—more like a woman."

"Thank you for the compliment."

"I said a little while ago that I was glad Dorcas had baulked my father in his greed—but I am not now."

"Indeed! Why?"

"William Halfday is a weak, vacillating man, over whom I might in time, and with study, have exercised some power for good—but with Dorcas I am doomed to fail."

"Your failure will not distress me," said Mabel; "why should it affect you?"

"Because—but there, there, I have said all this before, and you will not listen patiently. Until I knew you I was a vain prig, and thought myself a student of human nature, whom no man or woman could deceive. But you are as great a riddle to me as when you came to Penton Museum one evening in May."

Mabel laughed pleasantly. The shadows of the night had vanished; the dangers of it had crept back into the darkness, and she could look at life brightly again. The serious mood of Brian Halfday was worth a smile or two, she thought.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," he muttered in half reproof.

"I am not unhappy," she said; "why may I not laugh?"

"At me?" he rejoined.

"At your dulness, which cannot read a woman who has not attempted much disguise," she answered.

"And yet I understand you partly," he murmured, "and value your friendship and esteem before any one in the whole dark world before me."

"Why dark world?" she asked.

He did not explain. He confronted her with another question that brought them to debatable ground again. These two could not agree upon any question on earth, each was fully convinced a few minutes afterwards. Quarrel they must, by the law governing the lives of cat and dog.

"Have you seen Angelo Salmon this evening?" he inquired.

hour or two, and this question which, figuratively speaking, her companion had suddenly hurled at her, brought back many unpleasant recollections. There was a little furrow between the eyes as she answered slowly:—

"Oh, yes—I have seen Mr. Salmon."

Mr. Halfday glanced at his companion as if the tone of her voice had surprised him, and then went on:—

"He told me he should call upon you this evening."

"And he told me that he had done himself the honour of calling upon you," Mabel remarked.

"Yes, he called," Brian said.

They walked together in silence, feeling that an embarrassing, even an objectionable topic of discourse had arisen between them, and Brian was already convinced that he had been impolitic in mentioning Angelo's name. Still Mr. Salmon had called, had probably offered his hand to the lady, and Brian Halfday was anxious to learn what had been the result of this love-suit. There was something cold and hard in the new manner of Miss Westbrook, and it was probable that Angelo had blundered in his courtship, and complicated matters by dragging Brian's name into question—as the reader is already aware that he had done. The April nature of Mabel Westbrook helped to puzzle and distract him, Brian thought—she was never twice alike, hence there was no opportunity for a deliberate study of her character. Only a few minutes since there was the ripple of her musical laughter in the summer air, and now no judge looked graver. Yes, an enigma, this young woman from America!—he wished that every word of hers did not trouble his mind so much. It was aggravating, and came between him and his studies.

He was the first to speak again. Something that Angelo had said was evidently lying between them like a bar now, and that must not be. They were friends—she had acknowledged that she should look to him for help, if help were needed, and no paltry misunderstanding must set them apart, even for an instant. He had been never afraid to speak out all that was in his mind, and Mabel Westbrook should not daunt him. He looked behind at Dorcas, who kept the same distance from them, and was still strug-

CHAPTER XII.

A FEW WORDS.

MABEL WESTBROOK had forgotten Angelo Salmon for the last